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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: MINISTER OF CORRECTIONS INFORMS DIPCORP
OF PLANNED REFORMS

REF: A. TBILISI 0453

[B](#). TBILISI 0470

[1](#). (SBU) Summary: Minister of Corrections and Legal Assistance (MCLA) Dmitry Shashkin briefed the diplomatic corps March 18 on his ministry's current status and future plans. Shashkin addressed both corrections and democratic reforms, as he did with the Ambassador during a previous meeting (ref A and B). Shashkin appealed to the international community for assistance in helping his ministry move toward European standards. He distributed a list of current corrections and legal assistance needs/deficiencies to the group (faxed to EUR/CARC and INL). On democratic reforms, Shashkin said that forming commissions to ensure Georgia's democratic progress is a priority. Media freedom is the first priority, followed by property rights' guarantees, justice and court reform, and penitentiary reform. The Ambassador, along with participating EU and COE ambassadors, agreed that they would look over the list, examine current assistance programs, and meet soon to discuss possible assistance and coordination in response to Minister Shashkin's request. End Summary.

NEW MINISTRY HAS BIG GOALS...

[2](#). (SBU) After introducing his new Chief of Probation, Teimuraz Iobidze, Shashkin addressed corrections issues. He explained the ministry has approximately 100 staff at the ministry itself, with 4,500 total staff (including guards and probation officers), 19,000 prison inmates, and an estimated 23,000 convicts on probation. The Minister acknowledged that Georgia's penal system is far from European standards, but he intends to reform the system in this direction. Shashkin estimated he needs USD 127 million to bring the system up to western standards. For 2009, his budget is GEL 27 million (USD 16.3 million). Shashkin said that he wants to incorporate crime prevention efforts into his reforms, and revising the probation system is his first task. Shashkin said his ministry is also working to address healthcare, women and juvenile inmate issues, education, and job training (by placing workshops in prisons).

...BUT NEEDS HELP

[3](#). (SBU) Shashkin appealed to the group for cooperation and communication. He welcomed inquiries from the international community and NGOs. Shashkin said any complaints will be investigated immediately by his deputy and the MCLA's inspector general. Shashkin said the MCLA will hold an open house on April 23 at Gldani Prison #8, and invited the group to attend. The Minister distributed a list of "Needs and Priority Areas for 2009" to the group. It includes staff development, capacity building, improvement of prisons and the penitentiary system, and strengthening of the probation service and legal assistance bureau.

¶4. (SBU) As the designated GOG lead for the "second wave of democratic reforms," Shashkin told the group that his first special commission (ref B) will address media freedom. He said the government does not believe that "they have solved the problem," even though there are now eight talk shows on national TV. Shashkin further said that President Saakashvili "does not want to be criticized for media freedom." (Note: Post will report on the media situation septel. End note.) Shashkin appealed to the group again for assistance. He said he wants to sponsor a roundtable to ascertain international measures/indicators of media freedom that can be applied in Georgia to ensure media freedom. Shashkin lamented that the OSCE is likely leaving, as the country "needs a free and fair mediator," and they perhaps Qcountry "needs a free and fair mediator," and they perhaps could have assisted in this effort. The Ambassador noted that the U.S. and the EU had supported the "Michnik Group" which was established before the 2008 presidential election to address this same issue. Unfortunately, the group withered away after the election.

¶5. (SBU) Shashkin said additional democratic reforms would follow. In order of likely sequence, he noted private property guarantees, justice/court reform, and then prison/penitentiary reform. Shashkin said he is working with Parliament on ensuring private property rights, and pledged that the country would have a new trial system by 2010. He said a new penitentiary code would be in place by 2010, and that an NGO representative would be added to the current six-member probation/parole commission. (Note: Shashkin did not address reports of sentence commutations that were granted in November that halved the prison time for four

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former Ministry of Internal Affairs employees who were found guilty of murdering Sandro Girgvliani in 2006. End note.) Shashkin said he is working with the Public Defender's Office, and hopes that he can increase coordination and cooperation with the MCLA.

AMBASSADORS RESPOND

¶6. (SBU) The ambassadors welcomed Shashkin's briefing and promised to look at his requests for assistance. They noted that many ongoing programs currently exist. The EU said they currently are spending 23 million Euro on justice reforms in Georgia. The ambassadors suggested some ongoing programs could be modified to include some of the new requests as well. The OSCE representative noted that even if the OSCE mission in Georgia is closed, the OSCE will continue to work with the GOG. In response to a question about election code reform, Shashkin noted that this is now up to Parliament, but that the GOG is committed to democratic reforms. The Ambassador suggested that the international donor community (including USAID, COE, and the EU/EC) could review the requests together and then meet with Shashkin to discuss assistance in greater detail.

COMMENT

¶7. (SBU) Comment: As the former head of the International Republican Institute in Georgia, Shashkin is publicly committed to making progress on implementing President Saakashvili's promised second wave of democratic reforms. The government understands the importance of showing the international community that it is taking democratic reform seriously. In addition, it appears the government is making a concerted push on democratic reforms ahead of the planned April 9 protests in order to demonstrate this commitment to the Georgian public.

TEFFT